



United States Department of Agriculture

Update #3 – Questions and Answers

Mount Rogers National Recreation Area (NRA)

East End Trail System Realignment

George Washington & Jefferson National Forests

On Monday, April 27th the Forest Service was invited to a public meeting hosted by State Senator Bill Carrico at Wytheville Community College. There was an impressive turn out of concerned citizens who had the opportunity to voice their concerns. We learned a lot about some of the feelings and concerns that many folks have about the possibility of trails being closed.

I wish we would have had the opportunity to address some of the concerns and clarify some information at the April 27th meeting. I encourage everyone with interest in helping us to attend our workshop on **Saturday, May 30th from 9am to 12pm at the Wytheville Community College. We will be in Galax Hall, Rooms 201 and 202.**

Based on some of the comments we heard at Senator Carrico's meeting, we have developed some questions and answers that may help you.

Question 1: Why is the Forest Service looking at the East End trail system at this time?

We have known for many years that the East End has a system of trails that could be improved and that there are an increasing number of miles of user created trails. We've spent a lot of time in the last few years looking on the ground and working with volunteers and partners, such as the Iron Mountain Backcountry Horsemen, to improve our system of trails and identify areas that may be creating undesirable environmental effects such as negative impacts to soil and water quality. At this time, we want to continue gathering information and move towards a plan for the future.

Question 2: Is the Forest Service planning to close 200 miles of trails on the East End of the NRA?

At an Iron Mountain Backcountry Horseman meeting earlier this year, we stated that there are approximately 200 miles of user created trails across the NRA. We manage about 192,000 acres across 5 counties and the East End comprises a portion of that area. At this time, we have mapped approximately 50 miles of user created trails on the East End. However, we do not have a comprehensive map of every route being used by horseback riders and/or mountain bikes. We continue to find newly added routes every year.

Question 3: What is a 'user created trail'?

These are unofficial routes that visitors are using and/or maintaining. Some are old woods roads or railroad grades that visitors have found and are using. Others have been created by visitors and had vegetation cut, signs posted, and/or blazes put on trees.



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Question 4: What is a 'system trail' or 'system road'?

These are official routes that have names and numbers; have been inventoried, mapped, and are included in the Forest Service database of infrastructure.

Question 5: How many miles of system trail or road are available to horseback riders on the East End now?

The East End of the NRA lies between State Route 16 and the New River. There are 190 miles of system trails and roads available to ride now. Approximately 95 miles are system roads and 95 miles are system trails.

Question 6: What is a sustainable trail and why is that important?

Sustainable trails are designed, built, and/or managed to be able to withstand the type of planned recreation while minimizing effects to natural resources. Some characteristics of sustainable trails are that they follow the contour of the slope, have proper drainage, and an average overall grade of 5 to 10 percent. There are several additional aspects to sustainable trails which we will explain in more detail during public workshops and/or field trips.

The Forest Service manages many different types of natural resources such as vegetation, soil, water, timber, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, minerals, and air quality. We are guided by many federal laws and regulations. The Jefferson National Forest Plan which was finalized in 2004 outlines how we currently manage the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. Having a sustainable trail system is one way of protecting natural resources while also having a system of roads and trails for visitors to enjoy for the long term.

Question 7: What proof does the Forest Service have that the user created trails are negatively affecting water quality?

Our planning process includes an environmental analysis. When the environmental analysis is conducted, specific water quality effects will be addressed.

Prior to building new trails or roads, the Forest Service addresses the effects on water quality. As part of the East End Trail Realignment we are looking at all the trails and their impact on water quality. We manage water quality for a variety of reasons. Much of the Forest includes the headwaters for many streams that eventually provide drinking water for local communities downstream. Some streams support native trout and excess sediment in these streams affects trout spawning. We manage soil erosion and water quality for the long term future and consider the cumulative effects. A stream that has acceptable levels of sediment now may be in jeopardy of having negative effects in the future if sediment issues are not managed or mitigated.



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Question 8: Why is the Forest Service planning to issue a Forest Supervisors Order to close some routes and when will this occur?

Our Forest Plan states the mountain bikes and horseback riders are allowed only on designated system trails and roads. The Forest Service uses a document called a 'closure order' that is signed by the Forest Supervisor to implement new rules. The Mount Rogers National Recreation Area has delayed the closure order since 2004 because we want to have a more suitable system of roads and trails on the East End before requiring mountain bikers and horseback riders to stay on designated routes. We will work toward continuing to improve the trail system prior to issuing a closure order.

Question 9: Will I get a ticket if I ride the user created trails at this time?

No. Until we have a Forest Supervisor's Order in place, we do not plan to issue citations for riding on a non-system/user created route.

However, it is illegal to build, maintain, cut, blaze, and sign non-system/ user created trails. You can receive a ticket for these activities under *36 CFR 261.10 Occupancy and Use, Part A*. This is not a new regulation and has been in place for many years.

Question 10: What's next? How do I get involved in this process?

The Forest Service is continuing to work with groups and individuals that want to participate in our planning process. We are hosting a workshop at Wytheville Community College on May 30th from 9am to 12pm. We will be in Galax Hall, Rooms 201 and 202.

We plan to host additional workshops and field trips this summer and fall.

Question 11: Is the Forest Service planning to close Hussy Mountain Horse Camp?

No. We do not have any plans to close Hussy Mountain or any other national forest horse camps on the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area.

BETH MERZ

Area Ranger, Mount Rogers National Recreation Area



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